

Integrating soft Skills with education for producing more professionals

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Abstract

Soft skills are character traits and interpersonal skills that characterize a person's relationships with other people. In the workplace, soft skills are considered to be a complement to hard skills, which refer to a person's knowledge and occupational skills the reorientation of education which is one trust of education for sustainability also relates the importance of these so-called soft skills. The term soft skill is being used to describe skills that managers and leaders use that are subjective in nature, such as creative thinking, dealing with peoples' issues, coaching for performance, and so on. This paper attempts to throwlight on the meaning of soft skills, various categories of soft skills and the model for implementing soft skills in higher education for becoming professionals.

Keywords: soft skill, higher education

Introduction

Education is dominated by discussion of the hard sciences these days, with great emphasis placed on STEM instruction. This has left teachers of other subjects, such as art or history, feeling a little left out of the conversation surrounding how to adequately prepare students for future careers. However, even less discussed are the soft skills that students need to succeed once they're out of college and in the work force. There are rarely classes designed specifically for soft skills, but that doesn't mean these skills aren't important. Soft skills include talents such as creative problem solving that are distinguished from hard skills in a few important ways.

Soft skills relate to how you work. Soft skills include interpersonal (people) skills, communication skills, listening skills, time management, and empathy, among others. Hiring managers typically look for job candidates with soft skills because they make someone more successful in the workplace. Someone can be excellent with technical, job-specific skills, but if they can't manage their time or work within a team, they may not be successful in the workplace.

How Soft Skills Work

Soft skills are also important for the success of most employers. After all, nearly every job requires employees to engage with others in some way.

Another reason, hiring managers and employers look for applicants with soft skills is that soft skills are transferable skills that can be used regardless of the person's job. This makes job candidates with soft skills very adaptable employees.

Soft skills are particularly crucial in customer-based jobs. These employees are in direct contact with customers. It takes several soft skills to be able to listen to a customer and provide that customer with helpful and polite service.

Types of Soft Skills

Soft skills include the personal attributes, personality traits, and communication abilities needed for success on the job. Soft skills characterize how a person interacts in his or her

relationships with others.

Soft skills include

- Adaptability
- Communication
- Creative thinking
- Dependability
- Work ethic
- Teamwork
- Positivity
- Time management
- Motivation
- Problem-solving
- Critical thinking
- Conflict resolution

Teachers' soft skills are important. The attainment of these skills will make a difference in quality of teaching and effective learning. The quality of teaching is a crucial factor in promoting effective learning in schools (Tang, 2013). Teaching is a complex act, requiring a wide range of knowledge and skills including hard and soft skills to successfully manage the demands of the classroom (Tang, Nor Hashimah & Hashimah, forthcoming 2015). Since teaching is an additional complex process (Flores & Days, 2006), novice teachers need to have important soft skills. Consequently, teacher educators today are confronted with the issue of how best to ensure that teaching graduates will continue to be relevant and bring value to the job market. It is the responsibility of the universities to ensure that teaching graduates have relevant skills to gain employment. Hence, soft skills development should be imbued into the professional training program. Furthermore, universities should combine hard skills and soft skills in the curriculum if confident students with a sense of balance and proportion in these skills to be produced (Hairuzila, 2009) ^[1].

Definition of soft skills: The Malaysian Institute of Higher Learning interprets soft skills as incorporating aspects of generic skills which include non-academic skills such as communicative, critical thinking and problem solving, team

work, life-long learning and information, entrepreneurship, ethic and professional moral, and leadership. These are the seven soft skills to be embedded in the curriculum at Institutes of Higher Learning.

1. **Communication skills:** Novice teachers are expected to be fluent and able to communicate effectively in both Malay and English language. They should be able to convey their thoughts with clarity and confidence both in written and oral forms. They are also expected to be active listeners while providing the necessary response. They should also be capable of giving and using technology during presentation confidently.
2. **Critical thinking and problem-solving skills:** With this skill, novice teachers should be able to think in a critical, creative, innovative, and analytical manner which includes the ability to apply knowledge. Elements that they must possess under this aspect are the ability to identify and analyse complex situation as well as making evaluations that are justifiable. They should also have the ability to expand and improve thinking skills, to provide ideas and alternative solutions.
3. **Team work:** Team work skills involve the ability to work and cooperate with people from various social and cultural backgrounds so as to achieve a common goal. In order to build a good working relationship with his/her peers, it is essential that they are respectful toward others' attitude, behaviour, and belief. From time to time they are also expected to undertake the role of a leader and a group member interchangeably.
4. **Lifelong learning and information management skills:** In acquiring skills and knowledge, novice teachers should be able to do self-regulated learning independently. They should have the skills to search for relevant information from various sources and able to manage them efficiently. They should also be receptive to new ideas and able to develop an inquiry mind.
5. **Entrepreneurship skill:** This skill involves the novice teachers' abilities to venture into business and work-related opportunities while creating risk awareness. This skill includes the ability to identify business opportunities and be able to prepare, build, and explore business plans which eventually leads to self-employment.
6. **Ethic and professional moral skills:** With this skill, novice teachers are able to practice with high moral standards in the relevant professional practice. They should also be able to understand the effects of economy environment, and social-cultural factors on their respective professional practice. In relation to ethical issues, they should be able to analyse and arrive at decisions in matters concerning ethics. Beyond the working environment, they should be able to practice good ethics while having a sense of responsibility toward society
7. **Leadership skill:** Leadership skill entails the ability of novice teachers to lead in various activities. Novice teachers should have the knowledge on basic leadership theories which will enable them to lead a project. It is also essential that they are able to understand the role of a leader and a group member and be able to carry out those roles interchangeably.

Model for implementing soft skills in higher education for producing more professionals

A holistic approach is used to plan and implement the soft skills among students of higher education. This approach is based on the combination of several programs and main activities; formal teaching and learning activities (include all curricular and co-curricular elements); support programs (academic and non-academic focused) and the students campus life (students' residences and the campus surroundings). In general, the development of soft skills among the students via the formal teaching and learning activities takes two models: (i) stand alone and (ii) embedded.

- **Stand Alone Subject Model:** This model uses the approach of training and providing opportunities to students to develop soft skills through specific courses that are carefully planned for this purpose. Usually, these subjects are offered as university courses (such as English language, entrepreneurship, etc.) and elective courses (such as public speaking, critical thinking, etc.). The courses in this category are often a part of the overall requirements that make up the program. The number of courses and credits in this category depends on the curriculum design and the requirements of the program. The standalone subject model can also be initiated by encouraging students to sign-up several additional courses which can be accumulated to be a minor course which is different from the initial program signed-up. For example, a student who is pursuing an engineering program is encouraged to take minor courses in management or mass communication. However, such an approach will require an increase in the number of credits and time spent for the particular program.
- **Embedded Model:** This model uses the approach of embedding the soft skills in the teaching and learning activities across the curriculum. It does not require the student to take special courses as in the standalone subject model. Instead the students are trained to master the soft skills through various formal teaching and learning activities that are planned and carried out using specific strategies and methods. In this way, the content and learning outcomes to be achieved for the respective courses are maintained. The learning outcomes related to the soft skills will be integrated and be part of the learning outcomes of the respective courses. This is the suggested model to be implemented in all the courses for the different programs in institutions of higher learning. Each element of soft skills is spelled out in the learning outcomes and then translated into the instructional plan for the semester. This is followed by implementing several teaching and learning activities such as questioning, class discussion, brain storming, team work, presentation, role play and simulation, task/project, field work and site visits. In general, the development of soft skills using the embedded model requires the expertise of the lecturers to use the various teaching strategies and methods that are entirely student-centered. It also involves active teaching and learning and students should participate actively in the activities. Some of the appropriate strategies and methods that are practical include (i) learning by questioning, (ii) cooperative learning, (iii) problem-

based learning (PBL), (iv) e-learning.

- **Combination of Stand-Alone Subject Model and Embedded Model:** Each of the respective models described above has its weaknesses and strengths. From the framework, planning, implementing and assessment, the stand-alone model is definitely at an advantage. This is because the course or subject is specially developed to assist students to acquire the soft skills. However, this model lacked the opportunity for students to develop and acquire soft skills as integrated with other knowledge and skills in the major discipline studied. The existing number of credits for the respective program is also a constraint for students to sign-up for additional courses on soft skills. On the contrary, the framework, planning, implementing and assessment of the embedded model are more challenging than the stand-alone model. This model requires the lecturers to master specific teaching and learning skills and then apply these skills in teaching the respective core courses for the specific program. However, when carefully planned and used the appropriate teaching and learning strategies, this model is more effective in developing and acquiring the soft skills as integration with the other knowledge and skills in the program. In addition, this model does not require any additional courses to the already existing courses of the respective program. Based on the weaknesses and strengths discussed, the higher education institutes are encouraged to use the embedded model as compared to the stand-alone model. This is because the embedded model focus on student centered learning such experiential learning, problem-based learning and gives students the practical experience as well.

Importance of Soft Skills for Teachers

1. **Helps them make their classes more interesting:** If teachers wish to have a powerful impact on their students and make their classes lively and memorable it is vital that teachers have soft skills. Without proper soft skills, they will be unable to have proper classes and deliver their lectures in a proper manner. As we all know, students have a very low attention span and their attention needs to be attracted by the use of innovative techniques. A teacher who has soft skills will be able to modulate her voice and even make charts according to the need of the moment so that students are able to grasp the maximum amount of knowledge.
2. **To serve as an example for the students:** Soft skills are things which cannot be taught via a book or by a long lecture. Students need to improve soft skills by observing their teachers. If teachers are exemplary examples for their students then the students grow up becoming exemplary individuals who are able to make a success of their lives and also contribute very positively to the society in which they live. It is vital that all teachers who are hired on board to schools are able and skilled individuals who know the important roles which they have to play in the students' lives. It is for this reason why recruitment methods have to be absolutely strict and top notch.
3. **To interact with students at their own level:** Students are young individuals who are very impressionable and it is for this reason, that the teachers who are entrusted

to take care of them and teaching skills should be very able and abounding. It is important for teachers to have soft skills, because if they do not have soft skills, then they will never be able to give the students lessons and lectures according to their respective ages and cognitive ability. Their lectures will either be too high-flown, where it will go straight above the students' heads or it will be of an inferior quality consisting of things which students already know at that level.

4. **Enables them to be good leaders:** Teachers need to be good leaders and command respect so that their students listen to what is said to them and obey instructions which are given. If a teacher is frivolous and unable to have a serious and stern manner then students are going to end up becoming rather undisciplined. Having soft skills is vital for teachers so that they can be good leaders who are able to lead the students from the front and in turn encourage the students to become good leaders themselves. Lessons taught in school do remain with children long after their schooling has been completed and that is why the teachers must be chosen with uttermost care.
5. **Makes them much more approachable:** There is a fine line which ought to be maintained between the teachers and students. This means that both should maintain a respectable distance between each other. This having been stated it does not imply that the students should shy away from sharing any issue or problem with their teachers. Teachers should function as advisors and a guide for their students and it is only if they have soft skills that they will be able to guide the students along the right path and give them useful advice. Teachers should not be so aloof that the students feel afraid to approach them when going through a problem of any kind.
6. **Allows them to be sensitive to the needs of the children:** It is very important that teachers have soft skills, because if they are lacking in soft skills, they will not be sensitive to the needs of those students. There are often silent students who need to be encouraged so that they come out of their shells and in addition to that there are other students who need to be given extra attention. It is only a sensitive teacher who has high emotional intelligence that will be able to look below the surface and differentiate one child from the next. No two children are alike and teachers should understand that.

Importance of Soft Skills for Students

1. **Helps them in making friends:** Man, by nature is a social animal. It is right from school that children are taught to interact with one another, from a very young age. If children are not trained to be well mannered at a young age, then it won't be long before others start avoiding them. Social etiquette is something which is very important indeed. Soft skills are important for children as it helps them to make friends and form a meaningful relationship with others. Those children who have trouble interacting with others are never able to enjoy the company of friends or peers. Having friends is something which is very important indeed.
2. **Assists them in understanding the lessons being**

taught: The primary reason why students attend school is so that they can gain knowledge and learn new things. It is vital that students have soft skills, because if they do not have soft skills, they would not be able to understand the lessons which are being taught to them and they would not be able to imbibe everything which is being said. It is their language skills as well as their cognitive ability which allows them to process new information, arrange it in a proper manner and make sense of it as best they can. Based on the students' ability he or she understands things and remembers them in his own unique manner.

3. **They are needed for any presentations they need to give:** In the course of their school life, students are required to give a number of presentations. Right from a young age, students are encouraged to come forward and answer in class and even speak the minds on topical issues. Therefore, these important skills for students, because they require them at times like this, when they need to form opinions and deliver these opinions, supporting it with adequate arguments as well as examples. Students ought to be encouraged from a very young age to form an opinion and stand up for what they believe in.
4. **They need soft skills to help them express themselves during examinations:** At regular intervals there are exams conducted where students have to prepare adequately and write down answers according to the questions which are being asked. No matter how much they know, if students are unable to comprehend the questions and answer to the point, they will never be able to attain good marks and do well on the academic front. It is for this reason, that having soft skills is very important so that they can express themselves in a proper manner and write answers which are able to impress the examiners who are reading the answer scripts.

Conclusion

Soft skills are more important than ever for success in the workforce, given that the modern work environment places such a high priority of teamwork and communication. However, the modern school curriculum leans very heavily on teaching hard skills. As such, it falls to teachers to find ways of integrating soft skills into their current instruction. Teachers can get an idea for how to integrate soft skills into their instruction from several resources. However, there are always going to be some general principles to follow. Teachers should create or adapt existing activities so that there is a heavy emphasis on group work, independent research, communication between peers, time management, and presentation. By placing a strong emphasis on group dynamics, teachers can mimic the sort of work environment that many students will find themselves in once they leave school behind for the workforce.

Teachers won't always have the time to tailor make activities that perfectly integrate hard skills and soft skills. However, once you've identified a few key activities, you can adapt new lessons to integrate these same activities to future lessons. That can help keep your preparation time down while still creating the kind of integrated activity that helps students not only improve their content knowledge but the ability to apply that knowledge in the workplace.

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